



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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REGIONAL ISSUES COMMITTEE – Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 24, 2023

via Zoom

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 pm by Tom Matuszko. The meeting was recorded.

Committee Members Present

Malcolm Fick, BRPC Vice Chair; Alternate from Great Barrington

Andrew Groff, Williamstown (non-Commission member)

Kyle Hanlon, North Adams

Sheila Irvin, Pittsfield

Christine Rasmussen, Alternate from Stockbridge

Eleanor Tillinghast, Mount Washington (non-Commission member)

Committee Members Absent

John Duval, BRPC Chair, ex-officio, non-voting

Chris Rembold, Great Barrington

BRPC Staff Present

Tom Matuszko, Executive Director, Interim Chair of Regional Issues Committee

Guests/Public Present

Tom Hutcheson, Dalton Town Manager

Kent Lew, Alternate from Washington, Washington Selectboard Chair

Tom M. acknowledged the Committee members and other individuals referenced above as present at the meeting.

II. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

III. Approval of February 22 Meeting Minutes

Tom M. read the agenda item and requested a motion on the item. Sheila I. made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Eleanor T. seconded. No committee members had any further comment. The motion passed as follows:

Malcolm F. - Yes

Sheila I. - Yes

Andrew G. - Yes

Kyle H. - Yes

Christine R. - Yes

Eleanor T. - Yes

IV. Community Sustainability

Tom M. introduced the topic as a continuation of the past several Regional Issues Committee meetings and began providing an update of progress made by staff.

Tom explained that one of the tasks discussed in February was a regional calendar of training and relevant events. This was created but an issue with Wordpress resulted in the crashing of the agency website, so staff is waiting for updates to occur to allow the website to host the calendar.

Tom M. also referenced training sessions related to municipal recruitment that the Massachusetts Municipal Association hosted, so a staff person has attended the sessions to provide summaries to the Committee and municipal officials. Kent L. felt the best practices learned in this session will be useful, but may be difficult for smaller communities to implement. Kent L. also felt that any useful data provided during these sessions could also be helpful in these efforts. Tom H. mentioned that data he has seen to date has not provided much detail on actual public sector employment. Additionally, he would like to address that municipal employment is not something that has traditionally been pitched as a career option. Discussion ensued on how to best raise local and regional awareness of municipal positions. Christine R. suggested this could be done potentially through coverage by the Berkshire Eagle.

Tom M. transitioned to the discussion of next steps, and that there is not a lot of clarity at the moment of what the Committee should be doing to further this effort. One potential option is developing a position paper on the challenges of municipal recruitment and retention to be integrated into the state economic development plan, specifically around strong municipal government is needed for strong local communities. Eleanor T. raised the idea of inviting Anne Gobi, the new Director of Rural Affairs. Tom M. replied that there are statewide efforts as part of the Rural Policy Advisory Commission to invite Director Gobi to an upcoming meeting. However, this is a statewide effort, and the region should be represented as a whole, and Director Gobi should be invited to a future Regional Issues Committee. Discussion ensued on how to best present rural issues.

Tom M. concluded staff will prepare a testimony of the challenges the region faces related to employee and municipal recruitment and make an argument that this is an economic issue. Staff will invite Anne Gobi to a Regional Issues Committee meeting. Staff also ensure this issue is addressed when economic development sessions are held in the Berkshires.

Tom transitioned the discussion a discussion staff had with Representative Pignatelli regarding the council of governments model for providing regional services. BRPC has been asked to do more focused research on the topic and will take on as the agency transitions to Fiscal Year 2024. Tom M. has asked on how to approach the topic more formally with Representative Pignatelli. Sheila I. and Kent L. both suggested the invite occur once staff has researched the topic more so the discussion can revolve around how to move forward. Discussion ensued on how to approach the topic and how to best use time with Representative Pignatelli and potential outreach to Senator Mark.

Tom H. provided the perspective of a former Franklin County Town Administrator, and that it is a delicate balance to continue keeping the communities on Board to ensure continued participation. Discussion ensued regarding the dissolution of the Hampshire County Council of Governments, which is largely a good balance of services for the cost borne by the communities. Tom M. brought the subject back to Representative Pignatelli and his experience in part of the former Berkshire County government. The Committee continued the discussion of balancing town-wide services with what County government would theoretically provide.

Tom M. transitioned to discussing a Community One Stop for Growth application process. The agency submitted an expression of interest based on a project that would focus on

creating a municipal employee pipeline. Tom H. discussed Paul Sieloff's work to encourage communities to create assistant positions to help build greater regional depth in municipal government. Kent L. and Andrew G. both echoed the concerns of attrition over the years and setbacks to communities based on turnover. Tom H. further detailed lessened state support for increased employment requirements. Tom M. concluded that given the comments from the Committee, he may be asking for letters of support for the full grant application.

Next Committee Meeting Date – June 28, 2023 at 4pm

VII. Adjournment

Eleanor T. made a motion to adjourn, Malcolm F. seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m. after a roll call vote.